



RELIGIOUS LIFE

“I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. They will no longer teach their friends and relatives, “Know the LORD!” Everyone, from least to greatest, shall know me—oracle of the LORD—for I will forgive their iniquity and no longer remember their sin.” - JEREMIAH 31:33-34

OPENING ACTIVITY

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Do you remember praying as a young child? How did you think of God? How did you pray? Did it feel easier or harder to pray when you were young?

Share your memories with the class.

ESTABLISHING THE CONCEPTS

I NEED TO AT LEAST GIVE IT A TRY

A real letter from a young woman to her brother explaining her attraction to Religious Life.

Dear Steve,

I know that this whole idea of me becoming a cloistered contemplative Passionist Nun may seem like some crazy idea that I just dreamt up one night. Instead, this is something that I have been praying about for almost a year. At least three years prior to that, I began praying that God would reveal His will for my life and give me the grace and courage I would need in order to follow it.



After attending three or four youth retreats over a course of several years, I could no longer deny that religious life was something that I definitely needed to look into as a possibility. In November, at a Youth 2000 retreat, I had a very profound experience of God and the opportunity to share it with two Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. The following February, Mom and Dad took me to a Come & See Retreat at this community’s monastery. While I was there, I had fun and met some wonderful active sisters, but it just didn’t attract me or seem like something I would want to spend

the rest of my life doing. I continued to ask our Lord for direction as I attended retreats, putting my name on almost any paper I could just to obtain information from active religious. I also began talking to Sr. Mary Martha, a cloistered contemplative Poor Clare Nun, for spiritual direction. At that time, in no way whatsoever, was I interested in becoming a cloistered contemplative nun, but I felt I needed spiritual direction. I had no idea where God was leading me, but I still wanted to follow Him.

After one retreat I attended, I gave my contact information to the Passionist Nuns. About a month later, I received an email from Sr. John Mary. Through a series of e-mails, I came to find out that she and I had a mutual friend who attended high school with her. Some time later, Sr. John Mary invited me to their monastery for a Come & See Retreat. So at the end of January 2003, a friend and I went to the Passionist Monastery in Whitesville, Kentucky to attend this retreat.

Mostly, I had wanted to go because I wanted to see Sr. John Mary, but also because I wanted to learn more about where God was leading me. No thoughts of possibly joining their community had entered my mind. During this retreat, I learned so much more about what I desire from life and where God may be calling me than I could have ever imagined. We were able to experience some of what life is like for the nuns, including their life of prayer and silence. I know many people might think of this like having tape over their mouth or someone standing over them ready to slap them with a ruler if they so much as cough, but it isn’t like that at all. Yes, it is quiet, but it is quiet because the nuns choose to be quiet, not because they are forced to be. Those of us attending the retreat were given a tour of the cloister and invited to join the nuns in their evening recreation there. This helped me to know that cloistered nuns are not enclosed because they want to lead a secret, cult-like life, but instead because it helps them to stay focused on their relationship with our Savior.

Since this first visit to St. Joseph’s Monastery almost a year ago, I have been back numerous times, including several days in a row over my spring and summer breaks, a few hours on Palm Sunday with Mom, Dad, and some of the little girls, an afternoon in mid-September, and about five hours once every two weeks since early June. I have been inside their cloister living their life of prayer, study, work, play, and silence with them, in addition to receiving



ESTABLISHING THE CONCEPTS *continued*

spiritual direction from their vocation directress, Sr. Mary Veronica, and from their mother superior, Mother Catherine Marie.

As I look at the decision I have made to give the Passionist life a try after this spring semester, it sometimes leaves me feeling scared, nervous, and excited all at the same time, and even doubtful at times. I can understand that a decision like this is very foreign to what you can understand and relate to. I

wish I could explain to you exactly how I feel, but the only way I know how to even begin to explain to you how and why I feel the way I do is to compare it to marriage, specifically to yours. When you first met Susan, you had to be introduced to her just like I had to be introduced to the Passionist Nuns. After being introduced, you and Susan each had to make the decision whether or not you wanted to foster some type of a relationship with the other. The Nuns and I, too, had to make this same decision. Just as your relationship with Susan would not have grown had the two of you not agreed to work at it, neither would my relationship with Jesus through the Nuns have grown. Your decision to work at building your relationship was, I'm sure, greatly affected by your attraction to the way Susan looked, dressed, and acted. My relationship with the Passionist Nuns also was greatly affected by my attraction to the way they live, dress, and act. During your years of dating, your relationship with Susan took stronger and deeper roots and blossomed more and more each day you spend time with Susan or just thought about her. The same has been, and continues to be, the case with my relationship with Christ as I, along with the Passionist Nuns, discern His will for my life.

When you first saw Susan in your History class less than ten years ago, I doubt you thought you would be married to her with two beautiful children before you turned 24. When I got that first E-mail from Sr. John Mary, I can tell you for certain that my thoughts were nothing along the lines of even considering joining her community. However, as with any good relationship, time moved on, and I began to experience some strange feelings and emotions. I began to feel more comfortable moving about their monastery, as if I were at a very close friend's house. I felt



Sr. Maria Johanna, a young Passionist nun

as if I were a part of their community while I was there. An overwhelming sense of peace and security, happiness and joy comes upon me each time I go to visit. After spending several days at their monastery in early June, I even felt homesick when I returned to mom and dad's house! These feelings were all such a mystery to me, as I'm sure were your feelings toward Susan as you continued to spend increasingly more time together.

Your feelings and love for Susan have been stretched, twisted, tried, and strengthened in many ways over the years. I think especially of all the things that transpired between you two the summer Melanie and Joseph got married, and how close to an end your relationship seemed to be. After all that, you are still unable to express in words exactly how you feel about her or why you feel the way you do because love is a mystery that can only be fully understood through experience. You could explain as much as you want, but I will never fully understand the depth of your relationship with Susan. The same is true for me to expect you to fully understand my relationship with Jesus and my desire to love and praise Him all the days of my life.

Right now, I am in the midst of a very long and thorough discernment process, and am unsure whether or not God truly is calling me to live the rest of my life at St. Joseph's Monastery in Whitesville, Kentucky, but I believe that is where He is leading me at this point. I know that if I do not follow Him when and where He leads me I will never be happy and always wonder if I really was called or not. Even if I am not called to be a Passionist Nun, I will be a better person for having followed Him and giving Him the chance.

Love,
Your sister

Read more vocation stories at
www.passionistnuns.org/vocationstories

Be Curious

1. How do you think the brother felt after reading his sister's letter?
2. Summarize how the author compares marriage and religious life.
3. Take a close look at the photo of the young nun. How do you think she is feeling?
4. How does this letter reveal the process of discernment? What were the key turning points for this young woman to finally decide to try the Passionist life?



EXPLORATION

LETTER TO A FAMILY MEMBER

Imagine that years from now, you feel called to religious life and decide to join a religious order for six months to “try out” their life. Write a letter to a family member who may be skeptical about your call. In the letter, explain your attraction to the religious life and how you feel that God has shown that this might be your vocation. Anticipate the family member’s objections and try to explain your decision to enter the convent or monastery.



REFLECTIVE PRAYER

“Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would have not been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness.”
- ST. AUGUSTINE, *CONFESSIONS*

How is God speaking to you now? Can you feel his love for you? Tell God you love him and that you will answer his call for your life.

VOCAL PRAYER

The Magnificat

My soul proclaims
the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor
on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations
will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.
He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty
from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has come to the help
of his servant Israel
for he remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and will be forever.

AMEN.